

Suicide was the reason for 388 deaths in Slovenia last year

Partner organizations in public health MOČ project (OZARA Slovenia, National Association for Quality of Life, National Institute of Public Health, UP Andrej Marušič Institute Slovene Center for Suicide Research and Slovenian Association for Suicide Prevention) took the opportunity and enlightened the problem of suicide on the World Suicide Prevention Day, which is on 10th September.

This year's slogan of the World Suicide Prevention Day is *Preventing Suicide: Reaching Out and Saving Lives* and it encourages us to think about the role of help and support in suicide prevention. "We can achieve a positive effect and a change if we show care and concern to someone who may be vulnerable to suicide. We can ask them how they feel and listen to their stories without judging. Loneliness increases the risk for suicide while strong and real social bonds can act as safety nets. Therefore, being there for someone in distress and for the lonely, being with them, being there for them, can save a life or relieve the distress", said assist. prof. dr. Saška Roškar MOČ project leader from National Institute of Public Health (NIJZ) and national representative for International Association for Suicide Prevention.

She also adds: "Although the informal help from friends and family can be the key, it is not always enough to help someone who is vulnerable to suicide. Different forms of professional help are often necessary. These are the times when we can encourage the individual and give them concrete directions."

The decision to commit suicide and the path towards this act is painful for each individual and many times very lonely. According to NIJZ data, as many as 388 people died in 2014 in Slovenia due to suicide (325 men and 63 women). In that year, the suicide quotient (the number of deceased due to suicide per 100,000 inhabitants) in the country was equal to 18.81 (31.79 for men and 6.05 for women). In 2014, we have noted a decline of the suicide quotient which was the

lowest since 1965 (this goes for joint suicide quotient; for men and women). The experts from NIJZ think that the trend of suicide quotient decline is favourable in the past years and that it is maintaining good. Since 2007, the suicidal quotients were the lowest in the past four decades.

Under the leadership of activity coordinator, mag. Bogdan Dobnik, National Association for Quality of Life, OZARA Slovenia will prepare a comprehensive national campaign on the topic of mental health in September and October. This is probably the first such Slovenian campaign and it will include the preparation and the distribution of informative leaflets, setting posters of different dimensions and the airing of radio and television ads. Several media houses will be airing radio and television ads free of charge. 170 jumbo posters will be distributed in more than 25 Slovenian cities as well as three times as much posters of smaller dimensions. In the sense of free bill posting, the campaign was supported by the following Slovenian municipalities: Ljubljana, Kranj, Novo mesto, Slovenj Gradec, Koper, Ravne na Koroškem, Mengeš, Krško, Brežice, Murska Sobota, Prevalje, Mežica and Črna na Koroškem.

One of the key achievements in ensuring new services in the field of mental health are the psychological counselling centres which were set up in the framework of MOČ project and are widely accessible and free of charge during the project lifetime for individuals, couples and families. Thus, a network of nine psychological counselling centres was established under the patronage of the Center for Psychological Counselling Posvet, which operates in the framework of the Slovene Association for Suicide Prevention. The centres operate in Ljubljana, Celje, Laško, Sevnica, Kranj, Postojna, Nova Gorica, Slovenj Gradec and Murska Sobota.

According to data of counselling centres' business manager, Mojca Vatovec, 712 people acquired help from all counselling centres together during the project lifetime (from February until August this year) and 1708 free counselling hours were performed. The reception office in Ljubljana counselling centre welcomed 91 unannounced individuals, who needed help in mental distress. The network of

MOČ counselling centres represents an important preventive action in the field of mental health. Half of the clients are seeking help due to problems in the family (partner issues, divorce, problems with children, with parents, etc.). Among the clients, there is 26 percent of men and 74 percent of women. Nuša Konec Juričič, the head of working group for mental health at NIJZ, announced that another planned activity will start in September in the framework of psychological counselling centres – Ljubljana and Celje counselling centres will start offering free professionally guided experiential groups for parents and for divorced parents.

One of the MOČ project's main goals is the training of professionals. This part includes active involvement of NIJZ and Andrej Marušič Institute, Slovene Center for Suicide Research. Key to suicide prevention is that professionals that deal with the vulnerable are able to react in the right way. Assist. Proff. Dr. Vita Poštuvan said: "In the last few months of trainings we met with medical doctors, nurses, psychologists, counsellors, social workers, police and others who usually offer help or support to those in personal distress or in crisis situations. All of these professionals stated that they sometimes felt helpless, afraid or uncertain when working with the vulnerable. Recent results of one of our widest research (SEYLE) showed that it is important to make employed in supporting professions feel good. Namely, the preparedness of teachers to help students in needs was greatly influenced with how content the teachers were with their working conditions and whether their mental health was good. The same goes for all other professions and we can imagine that a doctor in bad mental health will hardly be able to help their patient." In the framework of MOČ project, more than 200 experts from different Slovenian cities applied in the NARA Programme – power to experts through mindfulness, which was developed at Andrej Marušič Institute in order to establish regular care for oneself and for own mental health. The trainings will start in fall. If experts take care of their own mental health, they can better manage daily situations at work where they are helping others.